DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 339 EA 031 943

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TITLE	Can You Be an Effective Principal When You Don't Smoke, Swing a Club, or Ride a Harley?
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	7p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Advancing Women In Leadership, Department of Educational Leadership & Counseling, P.O. Box 2119, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX 77341-2119. Tel: 936-294-1147; Fax: 936-294-3886; Web site: http://advancingwomen.com. For full text: http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/winter2002/jacobs.html.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Behavior; *Collegiality; Elementary Secondary Education; Females; *Gender Issues; *Leadership Qualities; Principals; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS	*Gender Gap

ABSTRACT

Socialization, once known as "fraternization," among superintendents and principals is a standard practice in educational administration. Socializing with colleagues is one way superintendents and principals, as leaders, enhance the teaching and learning environment for which they are responsible. The opportunity to share with and learn from other administrators is important for professional development. Yet, this paper asserts, social groups and social activities among administrators are generally split along gender lines, and women administrators often feel excluded. The paper cites several specific examples of "after-work" activities proposed by administrators that, by their very nature, seemingly exclude either women or men administrators. This implied exclusion of either gender is more than an issue of equity, the paper contends. For the future success of schools, women and men administrators must find ways to share with and learn from each other. (WFA)

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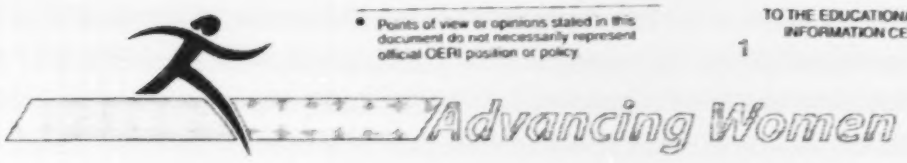

Advancing Women In Leadership

Can you be an effective principal when you don,t smoke, swing a club, or ride a Harley?

Jacqueline E. Jacobs, Ph.D.

JACOBS, WINTER, 2002

Perhaps, the day will come when men and women administrators will learn with, and from each other, without having to consider whether it earns (or costs them) "brownie point" with the superintendent.

The increasing desire for essential leadership skills that promote collaboration, consensus building, and empowerment of others has resulted in more opportunities for women (Logan, 1998) in educational administration. According to Patterson (1994), there "exists a world view in which gender and racial equity issues are no longer considered to be a problem" (p. 2). And, Logan (1998) suggests, "although problems still persist and much remains to be done to remove gender filters in the workplace, conditions are favorable for advancing gender equity" (p. 4). Yet, at the most basic levels of interaction, administrators may not exhibit collaboration, consensus building and supportive empowerment when interacting with each other. Consider this: if you don't smoke cigars, play golf, or ride a motorcycle, how effective can you be as an administrator? Even when you know something about being a good principal and educational leader, if you don't participate in the social activities supported by the superintendent you can't help but wonder if your teachers and students would be better off if you did. Patterson (1994) reminds us "we live in a society in which white men define and legitimate the dominant

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culture" (p. 3). This is a tale of how true that still is.

In the Beginning

In 1995, a new superintendent was appointed, in a predominately middle class school district of 12,000 students on the east coast of Florida. At the time there were eighteen schools (twelve elementary, one special school, four middle/junior highs, and one high school), with males running the secondary and special schools, and seven males and five females in the elementary schools. Not being sure that the sequence matters, I hesitate to give order to the list, but the golf outings appeared early on the scene. The superintendent in my former school district is a golfer, quite a good one by all accounts, and loves to share his golf stories. Within a few days of his hiring, a number of the male principals invited him to play golf and soon came to be referred to by others as his "golfing buddies". Since I am not, by nature, a cynical person, I do not choose to ascribe unsavory motive to their action. After all, they had been appointed to the principalship by a previous superintendent who supported a 'boys' club. However, as I reflect on the reaction of the female principals to the golfing relationship, I can't help but think about why we found it so aggravating. Was it really because none of us played golf? Or was it because we felt that the camaraderie shared on the golf course between the Superintendent and our male colleagues was "off limits" to us or maybe in fact gave them an "advantage", however intangible, that we didn't have? After all, as Gilligan (1982) suggests, women need connectedness in the workplace. Maybe we just didn't think we "could" invite the Superintendent to participate in an out-of-the-workplace activity. We never discussed our feelings about it, only shared the comments that come with seeing something happen for one school and not another when that "other" school is led by a "golfing buddy". Sometimes the "something" was as simple as the fact that the Superintendent talked about visiting the school of one of the golfing group and had never been to your school. Was it jealousy or justified concern?

New Opportunities

The cigar found its way into the principal arena around the spring of 1997, when the superintendent mentioned at an administrators' meeting that a "group" was getting together at a local establishment on "cigar night". In making the statement in front of the group, it could be assumed that anyone was welcome to join.

Several of the female principals felt that the activity was so "male" oriented that it excluded females just by its very nature. Some joked that maybe we could "take up smoking" and become part of the group. Others just felt that, once again, the message was clear: No women allowed. After all, we knew, as Gupton & Slick (1996) remind us, "Old habits and time-honored gender roles are nebulous and stubbornly resistant to change throughout a society" (p. 145). This certainly appeared to be true for the men in the activities selected, and also true for the women in not addressing the behavior.

The job of principal is demanding, stressful, exciting, and challenging. But, often, more than anything, it is lonely. So much responsibility, so many people counting on you, and very few people in the world that really understand what it takes to do the job. Educators are frequently reminded that we have much to learn from business people. And, as a life-long learner, I'm sure that we can learn from business people. However, NO one else in the world has responsibility for leading a group of adults who have to spend six to eight hours a day, with twenty-five to two hundred children or young people, while trying to teach those youngsters all the things they are expected to know. So, a chance to share time with principal colleagues has appeal. Knowing that there really are others who walk in your shoes and understand all that you have to do in twenty-four hours could go a long way in helping you deal with the demands. And the chance to share with your Superintendent in a relaxed, "we,re all in this together" setting, might even make the job on its worst days, bearable. Yet, the women principals often expressed that the demands of their jobs, the needs of their families, and their self-selected social responsibilities (e.g. professional groups, community service, and religious organizations) precluded such collegial time. However, I can't help but think that for women who made many things happen very successfully, we could have made time for the interaction. It seems to me, in retrospect, that our avoidance behaviors could be ascribed to the climate that exists when the activities endorsed by the district leader are not inclusive.

In trying to fairly reflect on the social history that may have contributed to our feelings of disconnect, I am aware that some leaders have strong feelings about a need to keep some distance between themselves and their employees. While I, personally, think it is possible to maintain objectivity, even when you have personal relationships with employees, I understand why some administrators feel this way. However, when the leader clearly participates in and even initiates such social interaction, it is perhaps even more critical that efforts are made not to exclude. Superintendents have learned not to ask principal candidates if they

attend church. They certainly do not expect to ask them to attend theirs. Yet, the careful examination of other social activities and their inclusiveness (or exclusiveness) has not arrived in some places, for some people. I wonder if one can learn how to include others in an environment that appears to be selective? Who takes the initiative? Which road will be traveled?

Perhaps, if we, as individuals or even a group of female administrators, had been more assertive ourselves, we could have initiated an activity just as the male principals did around golf. But, the motorcycle offer was probably the clincher for us that we "just didn,t belong." In the spring of 1998, at another of our bi-monthly principal meetings, the Superintendent told us that as a social activity, some of the male principals had gotten together and were buying motorcycles. They would all buy BLACK motorcycles and anyone who would like to join this riding club, could get information on where they were buying these BLACK motorcycles, and join them. I turned to one of my colleagues and commented, "I'm tempted to go out tonight and buy a PURPLE motorcycle and join them!" She laughed and agreed that we should. But, of course, we didn't. We just talked, with other female principals, after the meeting about feeling excluded: again. So it seemed evident to us, that, even at the end of the 20th century, there was still truth in the reality that, "women·are expected to conform to the leadership behavior valued and legitimated by the dominant culture" (Patterson, 1994, p. 4). But, obviously not expected to socialize within that dominant culture.

On Our Own

At the initiative of one of our colleagues, the female principals started having dinner together once a month at a local restaurant. We talked about little things and big things and trivial things and important things, but we didn't have our superintendent. While it is true we didn't invite him, we developed the group almost in what we probably perceived as self-preservation. We knew we needed and wanted the camaraderie of colleagues who understood the demands of our work. But we didn't have the "connection" that seemed to come so easily for our male colleagues with the Superintendent. We seemed to enjoy the "exclusivity" of our little group. I guess the men enjoyed theirs, too.

Could We Learn to Share?

At the end of a century that saw women fight for equality in every arena, it would seem we could have discussed the exclusion we felt with our superintendent, or certainly our male principal colleagues. I wonder if they talked about the fact that women weren't part of their activities, or if they just expected to participate in the activities with the superintendent because of the nature of the activities and were not even aware that we were excluded? I think if we had tried to address the exclusion, the tone of exclusion was so clearly set that we would have received such a defensive reaction that we would have felt, not only excluded, but also in fact alienated.

What strikes me as I think about the issue of socialization (what used to be called fraternization) in the workplace we know as schools, is that one of the goals of strong, competent principals is that they do everything possible to enhance the teaching and learning environment for which they are responsible. In our district the men seemed to have found a way to share and learn with, and from, each other. The women had to learn how to share and learn with, and from, each other. Perhaps, the day will come when men and women administrators will learn with, and from each other, without having to consider whether it earns (or costs them) "brownie points" with the superintendent. Because, after all, as Patterson (1994) stated, "there is more at stake than just equity for women and minorities in school administration: the future success of our schools hangs in the balance" (p. 11).

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